UNITED NATIONS

HRI

International Human Rights Instruments

Distr.
GENERAL

HRI/CORE/1/Add.50
9 November 1994

Original: ENGLISH

CORE DOCUMENT FORMING PART OF THE REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES

ESTONIA

[12 August 1994]

I. LAND AND PEOPLE

1. Estonia is situated on the east shore of the Baltic Sea between 57°46'N and 59°49'N latitude and 21°46'E and 28°13'E longitude. Estonia covers an area of 45,215 km^2, with an additional 2,000 km^2 still occupied by the Russian Federation.

2. On 24 February 1918, the creation of an independent Estonian State became possible. Estonia was independent until 16 June 1940. On the basis of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of 1939 and its secret protocols, the USSR occupied Estonia on 17 June 1940. On 6 August 1940, Estonia was incorporated into the USSR. It was occupied by Germany from 1941 to 1944, and by the Soviet Union from 1944 to 1991. Sovereignty was restored on 20 August 1991.

3. Estonia adopted the new Constitution of the Republic of Estonia by referendum on 28 June 1992. Pursuant to the Constitution, which entered into force on 3 July 1992, Estonia is an independent and sovereign democratic republic wherein the supreme power is vested in the people.

4. On 20 September 1992, the first free parliamentary and presidential elections since the war took place.

5. According to census data, the population of Estonia in 1989 was 1,565,662, of whom 963,269 or 61.6 per cent were ethnic Estonians, Russians 30.3 per cent, Ukrainians 3.17 per cent, Byelorussians 1.8 per cent, Finns 1.1 per cent and others 2.13 per cent. This represents a drastic decrease in the proportion of ethnic Estonians in Estonia, which was recorded at 97.3 per cent in 1945. The population in July 1993 was 1,516,600.

6. Estonia has undergone dramatic change since the restoration of independence. Estonia has commenced the implementation of a free market economy. With the monetary reform of 20 June 1992, Estonia introduced its own currency, the Estonian kroon (EK). The kroon is strictly pegged to the deutsche mark at a rate of 1 DM = 8 EK.

7. Primary economic indicators for Estonia are the following:

GNP in 1992 - 13.7 billion EK (1.7 billion DM);

GNP per capita in 1992 -8,560 EK (1.07 DM);

Inflation 1993 - 30 per cent;

Foreign debt as of 1 May 1993 - US$ 180 million;

Unemployment as of 1 May 1993 - 2.4 per cent and as of 1 September 1993 - 1.84 per cent;

Principal religions - Lutheran, Russian Orthodox, Baptist;

Average life expectancy (1990): men - 64.7 years, women - 74.9 years;

Infant mortality rate (1991) - 13.12 per thousand;

Birth rate (1991) - 17.8 per thousand;

Percentage of population under 15 years or over 65 years of age (1 January 1992) - 33.6 per cent;

Urban population - 71.25 per cent;

Rural population - 28.75 per cent.

8. The 1993 State budget is in balance. The amount of Estonian kroon in circulation is backed by over twice the amount in gold and foreign currency reserves. The foreign trade balance is positive, with foreign trade volume increasing 28 per cent in the first quarter of 1993 over the first quarter of 1992.

II. GENERAL POLITICAL STRUCTURE - LEGAL BASIS OF HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTION IN ESTONIA

9. Everyone has the right to the protection of the State and of the law (Estonian Constitution, art. 14). Ensuring rights and freedoms is the responsibility of the legislative, executive and judicial powers, as well as of the local governments (EC, art. 14).

10. The work of the Riigikogu (Estonian parliament), the President of the Republic, the Government of the Republic and the courts is organized on the principle of separation and balance of powers.

11. Legislative power shall rest with the Riigikogu, which consists of 101 members (EC, arts. 59, 60). On 9 September 1992, the first democratic parliamentary and presidential elections in over 50 years were held. Besides independent members of parliament, nine parliamentary factions are represented in the Riigikogu.

12. The President of the Republic is the head of State (EC, art. 77). The current President is Lennart Meri.

13. Executive power in Estonia rests with the Government (EC, art. 86).

14. Universally recognized principles and norms of international law shall be an inseparable part of the Estonian legal system (EC, art. 3). If Estonian law or other acts contradict foreign treaties ratified by the Riigikogu (including international human rights conventions), the provisions of the foreign treaty shall be applied (EC, art. 123).

15. The Legal Chancellor shall be an independent official who shall monitor whether the legislative acts adopted by the State legislature and executive and by local governments are in accordance with the Constitution and the law (EC, art. 139).

16. Justice shall be administered only by the courts. The courts shall be independent in their work and shall administer justice in accordance with the Constitution and the law (EC, art. 146).

17. Estonia has a three-tiered court system:

(a) County and town courts and administrative courts (courts of first instance);

(b) District courts (courts of second instance, which review judgement by courts of first instance as appeal proceedings);

(c) National Court (highest court, which reviews court judgement as cassation proceedings and cases involving constitutional disputes).

The creation of special courts for some categories of court cases shall be established by law. The establishment of emergency courts shall be prohibited (EC, arts. 148, 149).

18. Every person shall have the right to bring a case before the courts if his or her rights or liberties have been violated. Any person whose case is being tried by a court of law shall be entitled to demand the determination of the constituticnality of any relevant law, other legal act or procedure (EC, art. 15).

19. The rights of all persons established in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights are protected without restriction in Estonia. Estonia has also acceded to the Optional Protocol to the Covenant. The Republic of Estonia thereby recognizes the competence of the Human Rights

Committee to receive and consider communications from individuals who claim to be victims of a violation by Estonia of any of the rights set forth in the Covenant.

20. The Estonian Constitution does not obstruct the application of provisions of human rights conventions ratified by the Riigikogu in Estonian law.

21. The protection of human rights in Estonia is monitored, in addition to the State legislature, executive power and the courts, by the Legal Chancellor. On 10 December 1992, the Estonian Institute for Human Rights was established as a public organization.